WEARING MASKS AND STANDING IN LINES DURING THE “GREAT PAUSE”

Cantor Juval Porat

Most likely none of us could have foreseen the length of this “great pause” that we’ve all been asked to lean into. I sincerely hope you are all taking care of yourselves and your loved ones. While the scope of the suffering during this global pandemic cannot be downplayed, the conversations, acts of kindness, and connections made at this time prove to be a tremendous source of blessing and gratitude for me. How are you doing at this time? What sustains you? What practices have you found helpful in countering or softening anxiety, worry, and a sense of isolation? What has been helping you feel a greater sense of centeredness?

I’ve been thinking about the expanded meaning of masks at this time, juxtaposed with the way we used them only a couple of months ago during Purim. Each time I visit BCC, to work from my office or to lead Zoom services, I stumble upon the Purim scripts lying on the piano and the poster announcing the shpiel on our bulletin board - an eerie reminder of how life as we knew it has been taking a break (Editor’s Note: You’ll find some photos from Purim later in this issue).

Back then, we covered our faces to reveal a playful, often concealed component of our personality. We used our masks to amuse, to celebrate the courage to be authentically ourselves, rooted in our heritage, identity and larger community. These days the masks that cover our faces may still be creative - check out https://maskoncollective.de/ for some DIY mask inspiration, or https://www.facebook.com/wfpkrakow/videos/2727955233982406/ for an origami version of a facemask. But now they are a means to shield us from an external adversary as well as to protect the larger community from being exposed to the virus that has been the source of so much upheaval and disruption in our lives.

During the first weeks of physical distancing and lines forming in front of grocery stores, our weekly Torah portions recounted the many opportunities provided to the Israelites to worship through sacrificial offerings. Those offerings were the common practice to meet the need to communicate with the Divine, give thanks, express regret, attempt atonement, and express status. I’ve been imagining the lines of people forming outside of the Temple in ancient times — lines of people coming from all over the land, each with an offering they hope will be worthy of acceptance, perhaps eyeing the offerings of those in front or behind them.

A midrash (Leviticus Rabbah 3:5, an ancient commentary on the Biblical text) recounts a story in which a woman is said to have brought a handful of fine flour as an offering to the Temple. It is said that the priest scorned her, saying: “Look what she is sacrificing! It’s too cheap to sacrifice! It’s too cheap to burn on the altar!” The midrash goes on to say that the Divine appeared to the priest in a dream: “Do not scorn her! It’s as if she sacrificed her life.” The author of this midrash casts the Divine (and not a fellow human being) with the role of teaching the value of appreciating everyone’s gifts, of recognizing the gifts of the disadvantaged in our society who have to work harder and have so much less. This stresses for me the ethical importance of practicing generous acceptance of everyone’s offerings and resisting the human tendency to value someone’s worth by their material possessions.

As we stand in lines outside grocery stores, waiting to be let in and to be given the opportunity to meet our need for sustenance for ourselves and our loved ones, wondering if there will be flour on the shelves or toilet paper or pasta, I hope we can remember the poorest among us and how, to quote Rabbi Rick...
Jacobs, “poverty may in fact be the deadliest underlying condition.” This midrash in Leviticus Rabban reminds me that in ancient times, as well as during this strange time we find ourselves in, our society is plagued by inequality and the opportunity to reflect upon our choices and actions while standing in lines.

The days leading up to and following Passover reminded me of the ongoing narrative of liberation. As Jews, we recount the past — the journey of our people from slavery to freedom, from being faithless to introducing monotheism to the world. We affirm the present as we connect with each other during the Seder to share our current struggles and triumphs in our experiences of freedom. And we hope for the future, as we declare in the Hagaddah: “This year we are slaves, next year we will be free people”. We can choose the ways in which our stories fit into this narrative of freedom. The need for active listening in telling our stories has been particularly meaningful to me during these times — both while offering an ear to friends, congregants and family, and when sharing my own experiences with others.

Ghost-town-like neighborhoods, darkened restaurants and closed parks, the daunting news and endless uncertainty can all have a disorienting effect on us. The ritual of counting the Omer during these weeks has been helping me establish a routine at the end of each day, giving thanks for the blessings and affirming that which needs yet to be done. Check out 49 contributions by BCC members, one for each day of the Omer, the counting of the days between the second day of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot, at https://bcc-la.org/?s=Omer.

And then there’s Shabbat. Even though we get to “see” each other on our respective screens as we come together in community, prayer and song, we can still rediscover “the deep interconnectedness between us,” as Rabbi Lisa Goldstein puts it.

These are just a few examples of answers to the questions I asked at the top of this article. Jewish tradition, liturgy, music, and rituals have been instructive for me in providing meaning, centered-ness, and encouragement to keep moving forward. I would love to hear what’s been working for you, and I hope you take advantage of your BCC community at this time as we come together online to celebrate, honor, study, sing and observe all that our tradition has to offer.

Please subscribe to and check out our weekly e-blasts and Facebook page for updated programming, Shabbat services, study sessions and holiday observances. Please consider contributing to the Pandemic Relief Fund at https://pandemicrelief.unitedwayla.org to help bring assistance and daily necessities to people living on the streets, people at risk of homelessness, students, individuals, and families.

Thank you for the many ways you’ve been showing up, lifting up and supporting each other and our communities. I’m looking forward to reconnecting with each other face-to-face - without screens between us and with masks put aside. In the meantime, may this “great pause” gently direct us toward our innermost truths and intentions, and may we as a community be there for each other in living those truths and intentions to the best of our abilities.

With gratitude, Cantor Juval

P.S. As Rabbi Alyson Solomon’s tenure at BCC comes to an end, I want to thank her for her service and leadership. Thank you for “rabbi-ing” with us, for providing a sense of stability and a chance to explore the myriad ways of living Jewishly at BCC. Thank you for your guidance and support of the BCC community through reflecting on our rabbinc transition and assisting us in processing these changes. May you be blessed as you go on your way, Rabbi Solomon!

G’vanim “Hues (of the rainbow)” is the bimonthly newsletter of BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM 6090 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035 Temple Office Hours: Monday–Thursday 9:00 — 5:00 pm Friday 9:00 — 4:00 pm Phone: (323) 931-7023 e-mail: bcc@bcc-la.org website: www.bcc-la.org Rabbi Alyson Solomon is available for private appointments. Please call at least a week in advance, if possible, to schedule.

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Editor: Larry Nathenson. Graphics: Yanir Dekel. Articles should be typed, emailed or attached as Word documents to Larrynath@aol.com, by the 20th of the month before publication. To subscribe, send name and address and a check or money order for $18 per year; attention: Newsletter Subscriptions. Free to BCC members.
Dear Beth Chayim Chadashim Community,

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your rabbi this year. How fast the time has flown by!

I am grateful to have partnered with the Board and leadership of BCC and with our staff and for the collaboration of Cantor Juval. I am especially grateful to each of you, the people of BCC, for your warmth, your support and your confidence.

I look forward to sharing some of the highlights of this year with you at my farewell Shabbat, June 5, 2020, 7:00 p.m., as part of our First Friday early service. I will also gather and say shalom to our Ohr Chayim youth and young families at our Shavuot Palooza on June 6, 2020, at 10:30 a.m.; all are welcome.

Between now and June 6, before I take the remainder of my vacation and move on to my next professional position, I welcome you to reach out, join me for Tuesday night Torah study or for an upcoming Shabbat experience.

I’d also love to stay in touch with you and invite you to subscribe to my monthly vlog at thisisRAS.com, follow me on FB at Reb Alyson Solomon or Instagram at thisisRabbiRAS. My email is RabbiAlyson@thisisRAS.com.

If you’d like to offer a blessing, share an encounter or teaching that’s been meaningful to you, include a photo or poem, please post it here - https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/dn7elZX3.

This is my blessing for you:
May BCC continue to be a vibrant House of New Life for all who enter her doors, whether virtual or physical. May the leadership, staff and congregational community continue to guard and grow the ways in which BCC is a place for new ideas, new friendships, new learning and new creative ways to express what it means to be a Jew today in our endlessly diverse and dynamic global community.

L’Shalom,
Rabbi Alyson Solomon
CELEBRATE SHABBAT AND SHAVUOT WITH YOUR BCC COMMUNITY AT HOME

Community and connection are especially important for us during this period of Safer at Home. Please mark your calendars to celebrate Shabbat with your BCC community over the next few weeks, followed by the holiday of Shavuot to celebrate the giving of the Torah.

**Shabbat Friday, May 8th, 8pm** - Caring for Self, Caring for Others: Prayers, Songs, Rituals of Healing and Comfort. Join us as we honor BCC’s facilities staff and caretaker extraordinaire, Tim Goad, for his 25 years of heart-filled service to BCC.

D’var Torah: Healing modalities and wellness tools for self and family care with Melissa Stein, Licensed Acupuncturist and Herbalist, co-founder of Open Circle Acupuncture & Healing. For more about Melissa - [https://www.opencirclehealing.com/our-staff.html](https://www.opencirclehealing.com/our-staff.html)

**Shabbat Friday, May 15th, 8pm** - Shabbat service will include the spoken word poetry of Ahavah Brooks. The d’var Torah will be “Shabbat, a Journey of a Lifetime” by Rabbi Solomon.

**Shabbat, Friday, May 22nd, 8pm** - Jerusalem Day and LGBT Pride Kickoff Shabbat Service with A Wider Bridge.

D’var Torah: “History of LGBTQ Rights in Israel” by Quentin Hill, National Outreach Director of A Wider Bridge. Quentin’s bio can be found at [https://awiderbridge.org/a-wider-bridge-quentin-hill/](https://awiderbridge.org/a-wider-bridge-quentin-hill/).

Q & A to follow the service with more opportunities to learn about A Wider Bridge, the North American organization working through education, advocacy, relationship-building and grant-making to create equality in Israel by expanding LGBTQ inclusion in Israel, and equality for Israel by cultivating constructive engagement with Israel. [https://awiderbridge.org/](https://awiderbridge.org/)

**SHAVUOT AT HOME, Thursday, May 28th, 7pm-9pm**

Please join us for a night of study, food, music, prayer and community as we celebrate Shavuot, commemorating the giving of the law (Torah) and reflecting upon that which sustains us. All are welcome.

7:00pm - Yizkor service
7:30pm - Torah service
8:00pm - Study session with Rabbi Alyson
8:30pm - Study session with Cantor Juval

As Shavuot will most likely take place online, as we shelter in place, we invite you to make you favorite traditional Shavuot recipes and enjoy them as we observe the holiday.

NOTE: RSVP Required by Monday, June 1st! Email [rae@bcc-la.org](mailto:rae@bcc-la.org) to RSVP for your family. While Palooza programs are free and open to anyone with kids ages 0-18, for security purposes, we will only send the link to families who RSVP and will be using the “Waiting Room” feature on Zoom. Therefore, we do need an RSVP list. Our Room Monitor will not be able to let anyone in who has not RSVPed by Monday, June 1. (To speed up this process, please also set your display name on Zoom to match your RSVP name!)

VIRTUAL PRIDE/SHAVUOT PALOOZA FOR FAMILIES, SATURDAY, JUNE 6

Rae Antonoff Portnoy, Director of Education

Join us on Saturday, June 6, for a virtual Pride/ShavuotPalooza experience! We may need to practice physical distancing, but we can close the social distance and celebrate the joys of Shavuot and Pride Month as a community even from our own homes! The teachers and clergy of BCC are planning an exciting virtual experience for our final Palooza program of the year – families with children ages 0-18 are invited to join us for a rousing send-off into Pride Month & summer!

Our usual “Palooza Stations” will take place in Zoom Breakout Rooms -- if family members would like to join different activities, they will need their own devices (Zoom works on laptops, tablets, and phones!), but you’re always welcome to join a station as a whole family! Here’s the tentative schedule.

10:15 am Zoom Room opens, schmooze and say Shalom!
10:30-11:00 Opening Songs & Brief Shavuot-Pride-Shabbat Family Service
11:00-11:40 Palooza Stations Online! (in Zoom Breakout Rooms – this list is tentative, and the final list will be provided to families who RSVP)
   * Arts & Crafts with Ms. Purple (recommended ages: 2+)
   * PJ Library Storytime with Rae (recommended ages: 0+)
   * Games with Tal (recommended ages: 8+)
   * Text Study with Clergy (recommended ages: 11+)
11:40-12:00 Closing Circle - Singing and Drumming into Summer

NOTE: RSVP Required by Monday, June 1st! Email [rae@bcc-la.org](mailto:rae@bcc-la.org) to RSVP for your family. While Palooza programs are free and open to anyone with kids ages 0-18, for security purposes, we will only send the link to families who RSVP and will be using the “Waiting Room” feature on Zoom. Therefore, we do need an RSVP list. Our Room Monitor will not be able to let anyone in who has not RSVPed by Monday, June 1. (To speed up this process, please also set your display name on Zoom to match your RSVP name!)
A PRIMER ON THE EPIDEMIC OF COVID-19 AKA CORONAVIRUS

Marsha Epstein, MD MPH

Adapted from a longer virtual town hall presented on Sunday, April 12, for the BCC community.

I’m the Secretary of the BCC Board of Directors. I was trained as an MD physician and also as an epidemiologist with a Masters in Public Health and two years of additional training in Public Health and Preventive Medicine. I took a whole year of Biostatistics. I worked for LA County Public Health for 28 years. Public Health (PH) has been neglected in funding with repeated budget cuts at the Federal, State, and County levels. PH nurses, PH doctors, PH investigators and epidemiologists are needed right now to do tracing of contacts of COVID-19 patients, but because of these budget cuts we don’t have enough of them.

Now about COVID-19, which is caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2 commonly known as coronavirus. Other coronaviruses cause the common cold and severe pneumonias like SARS and MERS.

First, some good news. Physical distancing, wearing masks, and staying home works, and has cut the rate at which this disease spreads. COVID-19 hospitalizations and patients needing intensive care in Los Angeles County and California seem to have already peaked and are going down. Deaths are leveling off or declining. Cases in LA County may have started to level off despite increased testing. But my guess is that Californians will need to stay home at LEAST until the end of May. Everyone wearing a mask in public will decrease the rates faster.

We hear about the number of cases and the number of deaths. For the number of cases, it depends on how many tests are being done and what the total population is. As we test more people, it’s no surprise that we’re going to find more cases.

We don’t have accurate numbers of people hospitalized with COVID-19 outside of LA County and especially outside of California. CDC doesn’t have a national reporting system to know how many people in the country have been hospitalized with COVID-19. Only 12 states collect information on how many healthcare workers have been infected (California is one of them). So the only reliable number is the number of deaths. As of April 24 there were 18,517 total confirmed cases and 848 total deaths in Los Angeles County, which has a population of 10 million.

Someone who actually has the virus only tests positive 70% of the time. That’s why they may require two tests to make sure you don’t have it. But if the test is positive, it’s very accurate. 25-50% of people who are infected have no symptoms, or at least no symptoms that concern them. That’s why unless you have stayed home and everyone in your household has stayed home, it’s possible for you to have it but not have symptoms. And you would be contagious.

How is this virus spread? Although it’s possible to catch it from touching an infected surface and then touching your eye, nose, or mouth, MOST infections are spread person to person. In one reported cluster of cases, COVID-19 was spread from one infected person with mild symptoms to nine others, who then spread it further.

Face masks are very effective in preventing most people from spreading all infections that are spread by breathing. They are only partially effective at keeping you from catching what other people have if they are not wearing a mask. Wearing masks WILL protect healthcare workers, grocery store workers, and others with whom we have to come in contact. Since 25% of more of infected people have no symptoms, you could be infected and pass it on to others. So always wear a mask when you go out of your home to protect yourself and others.

By sometime next year we should have one or more treatments and maybe a vaccine. There are 440 studies on COVID-19 listed online at clinicaltrials.gov, and researchers all over the world are researching current medications and other molecules that might fight this virus. Seventy COVID-19 vaccines are currently in development worldwide, and three candidates have already started human trials, but they don’t expect to have a vaccine to give until next year. Hopefully at least one of them will be safe and work well.

People with asthma, autoimmune diseases, hypertension, HIV, and other chronic viral infections should continue taking their medicines. Patients who need dialysis should continue dialysis.

I personally have stopped going to the grocery store. Our young neighbors do our grocery shopping for us. We wipe down food that needs refrigeration and is wrapped in plastic with a 10% bleach solution or transfer it to clean plastic bags. We leave non-perishables in the grocery bag for three days out of the refrigerator, after which the virus is probably dead. The virus lasts less than 24 hours on cardboard, but two to three days on plastic and stainless steel.

You can make your own disinfecting solution with bleach: one part bleach to nine parts water to make a 10% bleach solution. And full strength hydrogen peroxide works as well.

There is no need to wear gloves. Just wash your hands frequently, as soon as you get home if you’ve been out. And there’s no evidence of transmission from take-out food.

As for herd immunity, with this virus there won’t be any. Immunity to other coronaviruses only lasts one to three years. Estimates suggest that anywhere from about half to three-quarters of the population has to catch it before herd immunity takes hold.
SOME WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED AND ENGAGED DURING THE PANDEMIC

Jessica Donath

As the coronavirus pandemic continues and the statewide Safer at Home order remains in place, many of us may experience feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and frustration. But unlike other threats to our lives as individuals or as a community, in this crisis the tools we have developed to deal with such feelings aren’t available to us. We are asked to stay at least six feet away from each other, when we want to embrace one another. We are asked not to touch anything, when we want to hold hands because we are scared. We are asked to stay at home instead of visiting those in our community who mourn the loss of a loved one. It’s difficult to adjust to this new, hopefully very temporary, physically distanced way of being in this world and still feel a sense of togetherness. One of the reasons I’m personally involved in a religious community, and particularly in this community, is that I know my BCC family will support me when I need help. During this trying time, we need to find different ways to care for each other, to stay connected with each other and the community at large. At BCC, Board member Hannah Theile connects folks who want to lend a hand, or say hi from six feet away, to those who need assistance. Our clergy, Rabbi Alyson and Cantor Juval, are also available to help us make connections. The following is my own curated sampling of opportunities to learn together, to help one another, and to ask for help.

- The Jewish Federation’s Covid-19 response contains information about the SOVA food banks and how to get a loan, among other helpful tips.
- The LGBT Center’s Senior Services program supports folks 50+ with food and essential hygiene products. You can shop on their behalf next time you place an order at Amazon.
- To access help and information locally, call the community help line by dialing 211.
- We can check in on our neighbors by joining one of the many mutual aid groups in the greater Los Angeles area.
- ShoppingHelpersLA, founded by a couple of Jewish students, connects volunteer shoppers with homebound community members.
- The Good Deeds Day blog compiled a two-part list of remote (read: virtual) volunteer opportunities.
- The crisis response guides put together by social action group LA Forward (losangelesforward.org) address a wide range of issues caused by the pandemic.
- Moment Magazine has published a guide to learning, entertainment and connection.
- Through its B’Yachad program, American Jewish University offers free online lectures and events.

If there are other ways you have found to contribute, please share them with me via email. Perhaps we can create a living document of the many ways BCC members practice tikkun olam, repairing the world - before, during and after the current crisis.

MEET ERIN KATZ,
BCC’S NEW OFFICE MANAGER

Erin is a seasoned administrative manager who has worked within the Jewish community in Los Angeles, Baltimore, and most recently Cherry Hill, New Jersey. She has a solid background in administrative management, marketing, strategy, organizational behavior, and strong organizational and people skills. She graduated cum laude from University of Massachusetts, Amherst with a B.S. in Business Studies and Organizational Management.

Erin and her husband Andy, their two-year-old daughter Darryn, and their two dogs Izzy and Bernie live in Tarzana. If there is one thing you should know about Erin, it is the fact that she believes it is imperative to be the best version of yourself daily. Giving back and providing help for the community is at the core of her motivation, both professionally and on a personal level.

Erin is looking forward to meeting you (virtually for now, hopefully soon in person.) Send her an email to say hi! Erin@BCC-LA.org.
FINDING A WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE

Jonathan Falk

We’re all stuck at home now, but you can still widen your horizons and find your worldwide community online. This might be a great time to get involved with the World Congress: Keshet Ga’avah!

Let me explain! The World Congress: Keshet Ga’avah [link to glbtjews.org], officially the World Congress of GLBT Jews, is an umbrella body providing a networking resource for LGBTQIA+ Jews from around the world to connect, engage, and support each other. The World Congress has member organizations around the globe, from Argentina to Europe to Australia, and strives to be the worldwide voice for LGBTQIA+ Jews.

Since its beginnings in 1975, with BCC as a founding member, the World Congress has challenged homophobia and sexism within the Jewish community, responded to anti-Semitism, and supported the growth of LGBT Jewish groups and communities globally. Some member organizations are congregations like BCC, while others pursue primarily social, cultural, and political activities. The World Congress has sponsored international conferences of LGBT Jews in cities around the US, Canada, Europe, Israel, Latin America, and Australia (2019), along with smaller regional conferences.

During these days of Coronavirus sheltering, I spent a recent Sunday reconnecting with the World Congress board of directors on a Zoom call of 17 people, reflecting an impressive diversity, both in gender and geography. While live conference plans are understandably on hold at present, plans are in the works for future events online or eventually in real life to bring everyone back together when all this blows over.

So if you’ve ever wondered what the colorful window decal on the glass door to the oneg room is about, now you know!

-Jonathan Falk served as secretary of the World Congress for 25 years, from 1993 – 2018, with a short hiatus, and as BCC’s delegate to the World Congress since 1990.

PHOTOS FROM PURIM 2020

It seems like ages ago now, but the last time many of us were in our beautiful sanctuary at BCC was for our Purim celebration on March 9. Here are a few shots of the Purim spiel cast, courtesy of Aviyah Farkas.

Haman and the King

Queen Esther and the King

The Royal Court
SPOTLIGHT ON GORDON BLITZ

Neal Wiener

I want to share with our BCC community the joy and pride I feel in my husband Gordon’s new birth as an extraordinary writer and performer since his retirement about two years ago, and the adaptation of his talents in this era of physical distancing.

Most of us have known of Gordon’s speaking and writing from occasional drashes at BCC, including the one he gave the evening of his last day working at a hospital chain where he had a 39 year career in finance and accounting. Before he retired he took poetry-writing classes at the Gay & Lesbian Center in Hollywood. Once he retired he began a daily blog, Culture Critique, which includes his reviews of books, TV shows, films, stage productions, podcasts and much more. He has included his own poems as well. His blog can be found at https://culturecritique.blog

Now Gordon is experiencing a recognition of his writing and reciting talent that has made him “drunk with joy.” He wrote short stories based on his memoirs and read them on stage at Akbar, a bar and performance venue in Silver Lake. These were audio recorded as part of their Queer Slam series, and the producer decided that with physical distancing they would do a podcast of past Akbar performances.

For the online version of Queer Slam, the producer decided that since Gordon had performed numerous times, the premiere episode would be “Just Gordon.” This collection of Gordon’s funny and often poignant performances is now available online on Sound Cloud. Go to Sound Cloud, click on Discover, type in Queer Slam, and then click on top entry, Episode 21. The producer’s emails to Gordon were wonderfully warm and appreciative of his talent.

I am so proud Gordon is enjoying his retirement, exploring and improving his many talents, and helping friends in need. He has continued to expand his retired life taking courses ranging from two writing classes, a political science class, theatre, music appreciation and a comedy improv class. The latter class is not only enjoyable on its own but also adds to his burgeoning stand up comedy appearances. This facet of his talent was on display Wednesdays at The Village in Hollywood — not to resume until comedy is recognized as an essential job by the government!

BCC BOOKS AND BAGELS

Larry Nathenson

BCC’s Book Group (Books and Bagels) has been meeting continuously since January 1995. The group meets monthly in members’ homes for a bagel brunch and discussion of a book selected by the group (although now we are meeting by Zoom until further notice). We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). Our next two meetings are as follows.

Sunday, May 31, 10:00 am
Find Me, by Andre Aciman

This novel is the sequel to Call Me by Your Name, which we read several years ago and which was a major motion picture more recently. Electronic copies are currently available through LA Public Library.

Sunday, June 28, 10:00 am
We Stand Divided, by Daniel Gordis

This is a non-fiction book about the rift between American and Israeli Jews on the Palestinian question and other current topics.

The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required. For more information, contact Larry Nathenson at Larrynath@aol.com.

BCC’S LIFE TRANSITIONS SUPPORT GROUP
(on hiatus but available by phone)

If you could use some help dealing with the stress of relationships, careers, economics, social life, family life, health or bereavement, you might want to give the BCC Life Transitions Group a try. The goal of the BCC Life Transitions Group is to enhance participants’ spiritual and emotional growth. Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences, give and receive mutual support, and exchange coping skills with one another in a confidential atmosphere. Everyone is welcome - members and non-members alike. The group meets twice a month on the first and third Wednesdays from 7:00 - 9:00 pm, but is on hiatus during the current pandemic.

This support group is facilitated by Shirley Hirschberg, Social Worker. Shirley is also available for individual sessions, and can be reached at (310) 990-6811.
As many of you know, I compiled a history of BCC for our 40th anniversary. It was serialized in this newsletter in six parts from September 2012 to July 2013 and can now be found on our website. Having joined BCC in 1983, I had my own collection of primary source materials for the last three decades. But for the first decade I relied on sources provided by others (in particular Stan Notkin) and on the work of Steve Sass, who wrote a history of BCC’s first decade for the 30th anniversary in 2002.

In February of this year, Jerry Nodiff, who joined BCC in 1974, gave me his collection of many of the early issues of this newsletter. Since we are now required to shelter in place, I have had plenty of time to look through them. In this article, and a few more in the months to come, I would like to share with you some of the more interesting things I found.

Here are the front covers of the issues from August 1974 and April 1976 (the newsletter was published monthly in those pre-internet days because it was the primary way we communicated with members who didn’t attend Shabbat services every week; we switched to bimonthly in 2005).

The first thing you may notice is that the front pages do not contain any articles. The newsletter was printed on 8 ½ by 11 paper then, folded over, so that each page was only 8 ½ by 5 ½. We didn’t switch to 11 by 17 paper until August 1984, when articles began to appear on the front page.

The next thing that jumps out is the logo. In 1974 the BCC logo was a circle with the tablets of the law (Ten Commandments) and Hebrew letters aleph through yod, surrounded by the English words “religion,” “education,” and “fellowship.” These correspond to the traditional three functions of a synagogue as a house of prayer (bet t’filah), house of study (bet midrash) and house of assembly (bet knesset) but give no hint that BCC was a temple for gays and lesbians. By 1976 the logo was a Star of David with a lambda inside it, so we had come out a little more as a congregation.

In August 1974 BCC was described as a “Metropolitan Community Temple,” reflecting our founding under the auspices of Rev. Troy Perry’s Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), the world’s first religious denomination specifically for gays and lesbians. Soon after that, BCC was admitted to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now Union for Reform Judaism), the first mainstream denomination of any religion to admit a gay and lesbian congregation, so the issues starting in October 1974 reflected that milestone.

The next interesting observation is that both covers simply say “Newsletter.” The name G’vanim was not adopted until about 1980 (I don’t know exactly when because there are gaps in the issues I have). G’vanim is Hebrew for hues or colors, and most likely reflects the rainbow symbol of our community.

Below the volume number and date, the August 1974 cover describes BCC as “formed to serve the spiritual needs of the homophile Jewish community.” This quaint language did not last long; by 1976 we were “a Temple with an outreach to the gay Jewish community.” Surprisingly, the word “lesbian” wasn’t added until 1982! And nobody was even thinking about bisexual and transgender Jews until years after that.

My last observation about the covers is that at the bottom they both contain a candle and a pithy quote. This was a semi-regular feature in the early years of BCC. Here are a few more of these quotes that appeared on front covers.

Human Needs:
Some food, some work,
Some fun, some-one.
E.M. Walker (July 1975 issue)

As long as a person breathes, (S)he should not lose hope.
Talmud J. (Jerusalem): Berakoth, 9:1 (December 1976 issue)

There is no room for God in the man
Who is filled with himself.
Baal Shem Tov (founder of Hasidic Judaism) (March 1978 issue)

Around 1981 the pithy quotes disappeared, replaced by stylized art in some issues. Here is the cover from October 1982, with drawings for the fall holidays.

In the coming issues, I’ll take you inside a few of these early issues to see what our leaders were thinking and writing.